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## **The Status of Women Economists in the U.S. — and the World**

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## **The Status of Women Economists in the U.S. — and the World**

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This paper gives an overview of the current (and recent past) status of women economists in the United States and describes what American economists have done to promote gender equality in the economics profession. Initiatives include in large part what the American Economic Association, through its Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession has done.<sup>1</sup> I will also discuss the creation and subsequent activities of the International Association for Feminist Economics and the activities of several other groups and committees recently formed in other parts of the world. I will close by considering what needs to be done worldwide to improve the status and increase the participation of women in the economics profession.

### **Formation of Women's Groups within the Economics Profession**

Women's issues have been of at least intermittent interest to the economics profession throughout its existence, and women have been economists since early times. But a critical mass of women economists was not achieved until fairly late in the twentieth century. Then there was a movement to have women's issues regarding their careers in the economics profession recognized formally as an organizational concern. In the early 1970s, a number of economists, many of whom are still active in the profession,<sup>2</sup> came together to force this issue.

Hence, while the American Economic Association (AEA) was founded in 1885, it was not until the December 1971 meetings that a resolution was introduced and passed to form a

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<sup>1</sup> Web addresses for all organizations mentioned by name in this paper that have webpages are listed in order of organizational founding in the Appendix at the end of the Explorations Section.

<sup>2</sup> Organizers, sympathizers, and members of the first Committee include Francine Blau—the current chair of the Committee (who was a graduate student at the time), Carolyn Shaw Bell—the first chair, Walter Adams, Barbara Bergmann, Kenneth Boulding, Mariam Chamberlain, Robert Eisner, John Kenneth Galbraith, Barbara Reagan, Myra Strober, and Phyllis Wallace. Mariam Chamberlain wrote a grant to the Ford Foundation, which helped finance CSWEP during its formative years (Bartlett 1997).

committee to investigate the status of women in the economics profession.<sup>3</sup> In May 1972, 87 years after the AEA's founding, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) was formed as an *ad hoc* committee of the AEA. In March 1974 it became a standing committee of the AEA. CSWEP has operated continuously since 1972, submitting its first annual report at the December 1972 meetings, and having its report published every May thereafter in the annual AEA Papers and Proceedings.<sup>4</sup>

While CSWEP is the oldest formal group to address women economists' career concerns, a number of other groups have developed. These fall into four categories. One type of group are standing committees or affiliates of geographically-based economics associations, notably the Canadian Women Economists Network/Réseau de Femmes Économistes (CWEN), the Royal Economic Society's Committee for Women in Economics (RESCWE), and the Economic Society of Australia's Committee for Women in Economics. These are quite similar in nature to CSWEP, with their primary concern being career advancement and increased representation of women in the economics profession.

The second type of group arose out of concerns that feminist research and methodological issues were not adequately (or necessarily appropriately) addressed under the association affiliate or committee structure, but required rather a separate organization. This type of organization is exemplified by the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE),

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<sup>3</sup> The wording of the resolution is quite proactive. It begins: "Resolved that the American Economic Association declares that economics is not exclusively a man's field. The Association herewith adopts a positive program to eliminate sex discrimination among economists, whether employed in universities and colleges, industry, finance, publishing, or other endeavors." It goes on to state a number of principles, including active encouragement of the study of economics by women and no gender discrimination in admission to education, employment, and pay. The resolution further establishes the Committee and encourages flexibility in part-time opportunities, appointment of women to leadership positions such as journal editorial boards and program chairs, and provision of child-care at future Association meetings.

<sup>4</sup> Anyone who pays CSWEP dues is an associate of CSWEP; CSWEP is constituted of six to twelve members appointed by the AEA, serving overlapping three-year terms, who undertake and implement the majority of its initiatives.

a group that was initiated primarily by U.S. economists (and still is somewhat dominated by them in its membership).<sup>5</sup> IAFFE members in other regions have formed a number of loosely affiliated groups, committees, and networks/email lists in Europe (IAFFE-Europe, the Dutch group FENN, the German group Economics, Feminism, and Science, and the Austrian group Österreichische Feministische ÖkonomInnen). These groups network locally and potentially organize meetings and sessions at other association meetings.

The third type of group is a subgroup, generally career-oriented rather than methodology-oriented, of an economics association that is organized along subject matter lines. This type of group appears to be quite rare and not very stable. Perhaps the longest lasting of these groups is the Committee on Women in Agricultural Economics, in existence since 1981. I was not able to identify another currently operating group of this type. These groups are likely to be relatively small in size and thus underfunded, so they may exist relatively informally rather than developing group structures such as webpages and listservs. There was some evidence that the National Association of Business Economists at least used to have such a committee, based on passing references to the status of women on its webpage.

The fourth type of group is a regional or metropolitan area group of women economists who come together for occasional meetings, generally involving lunch or dinner and a speaker, and may also put out a newsletter and/or run a mailing/emailing list. For example, there was a New England Women Economists Association centered on Boston,<sup>6</sup> and there was a Washington (D.C.) Women Economists group.<sup>7</sup> These groups have the advantage of tending to include more

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<sup>5</sup> Aerni and Nelson (1995).

<sup>6</sup> This group was founded by Barbara Sawtelle at Simmons College in Boston in 1991 and was still active into at least the late 1990s. While it is still mentioned on Sawtelle's webpage, it does not appear to have its own webpage anymore.

<sup>7</sup> This group was mentioned in the 1981 CSWEP report as having formed in early 1979, and later gave birth to the Washington Economists Network (in November 1995), a group welcoming all economists (as announced in the

women economists who are not primarily academics, but tend to rise and fall with the energy levels of one or two key organizers.

These groups, except perhaps some of the latter, do not bar men from joining. Indeed, men are encouraged to become members of both CSWEP and IAFFE. There are some activities, for instance participation on some of the CSWEP-sponsored sessions at the American Economic Association meetings, that require either that one be a woman, or that at least one co-author on a paper is a woman. In the case of IAFFE, even though being a feminist does not automatically imply being a woman, the membership and attendance at conferences tends to be about ninety-five percent women. Thus, even though the main function of the second type of group is to advance a particular research methodology and/or agenda, the group's existence and meetings serves a networking function for women as well.

### **What Have Women's Groups Accomplished in Economics?**

What has been the effect of these various groups to date? They have been instrumental in raising awareness in the profession of both women's concerns and feminists' concerns, and advancing both an antidiscrimination and even affirmative action agenda regarding hiring and pay in the academic part of the profession in particular. It is likely that much of the increased visibility of these women's groups is due to the demographic trend of increasing representation of women in the profession. This trend, for the most part, is not directly attributable to the existence of these groups, but is indicative of larger trends towards increasing representation of women in the labor force and in the professions as their educational attainment has risen substantially over the past fifty years. But the groups have played a critical role in organizing the

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Winter 1996 CSWEP newsletter). More recently (since at least early 2000, and ongoing), CSWEP has been cosponsoring quarterly talks with the National Economists Club in Washington, D.C.

women in the profession to agitate for systematic reforms and have assisted numerous women in building their careers.

One of the most important things that CSWEP has done is pioneered the systematic statistical tracking of women's progress through the profession pipeline. Because CSWEP was charged with monitoring women's progress, a push occurred to collect data systematically from economics departments in the U.S. regarding the gender composition of both students and faculty. This led to the AEA's annual survey currently known as the Universal Academic Questionnaire (UAQ), which provides information not only on gender composition of the economics profession, but also widely-used salary information.

Table 1 shows the trend in the U.S. academic part of the profession from 1972 through 2004 (and includes the years 1996, 2000, and 2002 for comparison with the UK, Canadian, and Chinese data reported in the following papers). In general, the numbers show steady progress in increasing the representation of women at all levels of the pipeline. The proportion of full professors has tripled, and the proportion of associate professors has more than quadrupled. Twenty-nine percent of Ph.D. candidates are now women, as compared to twelve percent in 1972.

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Table 1 about here

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The current faculty numbers for the United Kingdom, Canada, and China as discussed in the following sections of this Exploration, are comparable, also showing a substantial decline in women's representation as one moves up the academic ladder.

However, in all four cases, the representation of women in economics positions lags far behind the representation of women in the academy overall. The bottom portion of the table shows the remarkable increase in women in the U.S. academy overall during this thirty-two year period. It is noticeable that while the representation of women in the U.S. profession has grown as well, it is far from proportional representation.

An additional concern is that women may be relatively highly represented among the more marginal positions in the profession, including temporary and adjunct positions. In the U.K., Canadian, and Chinese data, women have higher representation in these types of designations than in the standard tenure track positions. The U.S. data present a more mixed picture. In the 2004-2005 academic year, women held 35 percent of the full-time non-tenure track positions, which is higher than their representation in full-time tenured and tenure-track positions. However, they held 22 percent of the part-time tenured or tenure-track positions, and 29 percent of the part-time non-tenure-track positions, numbers that are not out of line with their representation in full-time tenure-track positions (American Economic Association, Universal Academic Questionnaire data).

A final area of concern is the relatively low representation of women among undergraduate majors in economics. A big increase in their representation from 1972 to 1982 was followed by a significant leveling off of their numbers, so the proportion has not risen since 1982. While many economists enter the profession from other undergraduate majors, including applied mathematics, this is nonetheless indicative of a fairly small pool of women who might consider entering the profession. This fact, coupled with the increased number of alternative types of graduate programs (such as interdisciplinary policy-oriented Ph.D. programs) that might attract those women who would formerly have been drawn to an economics Ph.D. program for



graduate work, leads to concern about the number of women who might enter the field in the near future.

The dual problems of initial recruitment into economics and other feeder majors and subsequent loss of women all along the stages of the academic pipeline have been tackled with varying degrees of success by the Women's Committees. The Committees tend to be more focussed on keeping women in economics and furthering their careers as opposed to actively recruiting additional women into the profession. Many of their activities operate under the assumption that giving women additional opportunities for professional exposure and facilitating women economists' meeting one another will contribute not only to a more congenial environment in the profession, but also to positive outcomes at critical career junctures, in particular at tenure and promotion time.

For example, CSWEP has undertaken a number of networking and career-furthering initiatives, many of which have continued unabated since its inception. These continuing activities include compiling and publishing a roster of women economists, publishing a newsletter several times a year with both articles on career issues and items of professional interest, such as calls for papers, announcements of sponsored sessions, and job listings, and sponsoring sessions at both the national and regional meetings<sup>8</sup>—both on gender-related research and on other topics where research by young women is given priority for acceptance.<sup>9</sup> CSWEP also had two conferences on women's issues, one in the mid-1970s at Wellesley College and another in the 1980s at the Brookings Institution, both of which led to published volumes

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<sup>8</sup> CSWEP designates four of its Board members as charged with organizing activities at the regional meetings, including business meetings, sessions, and often a hospitality suite. Thus CSWEP is visible at the Eastern, Midwest, Southern, and Western Economics Association meetings, somewhat negating the need for additional regional organizations.

<sup>9</sup> My own career has certainly been significantly influenced by CSWEP activities. I gave three papers on CSWEP-sponsored sessions on gender issues at the American Economic Association meetings, all of which were subsequently published. My time on the CSWEP Board was invaluable in learning how the profession operates.

(Blaxall and Reagan, 1976; Brown and Pechman, 1987). In addition, CSWEP has undertaken several rounds of running mentoring workshops, sponsored by a grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation, with the most recent round occurring in early 2006, and has started the Joan Haworth Mentoring Fund to support mentoring by women professional economists. At the mentoring workshops, young women (and a few men) who have not yet received tenure participate in career advice and discussion sessions run by more senior members of the profession. They are also encouraged to “self-mentor” through team mentoring by forming ongoing support groups with other workshop participants who do research on related topics.

While CSWEP has consistently pushed for more—and more visible—research on economic issues relating to women and gender, IAFPE has also taken a role in promoting economics research in these areas. It has done this through its annual conference, which is increasingly held in different areas of the world, through IAFPE-sponsored sessions at the Allied Social Science Associations (ASSA) meetings and at some of the regional U.S. association meetings, and through its journal *Feminist Economics*. These CSWEP and IAFPE-sponsored sessions have made a big difference in many young economists’ careers—mainly women’s—who now see professional outlets available for presenting and publishing research on topics that previously were marginalized in the profession.

But perhaps the most important thing that the women’s committees have done is pushed for the greater professionalization of the profession. Through its newsletters, workshops, and advice on career advancement, CSWEP has demystified the workings of the U.S. economics profession and made the processes of hiring, promotion, and research more transparent. The profession now has more double-blind refereeing processes, more consistent interviewing practices, and more representative selection and organization committees for journals and

associations. CSWEP hospitality suites and more readily available child care at the ASSA meetings have made the national meetings a more friendly—and family-friendly—place. Thus the “old boys” network, which often operated to the distress of many young men as well as most young women new to the profession, has been attenuated and partially supplanted with a more inclusive economists’ networking system.

### **Next Steps towards Achieving Women’s Full Representation in the Economics Profession**

While women have increased their representation and visibility in the profession substantially over the past thirty years, much more remains to be done. This section offers some suggestions for what I would like to see happen within the next decade.

First, I would look for the creation of more women’s groups, caucuses, organizations, and/or committees in the regional and country associations. The European Economic Association is notably absent from the list of associations with a women’s group. Most of the newer country organizations also have no such caucus or committee. Organizations like the Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association, which are regionally oriented in both membership and topic coverage, also have no such group. These organizations will become increasingly important as more people are receiving their economics Ph.D. outside the U.S. and thus have less of a connection to the AEA. Clearly the formation in late 2003 of China’s Women Economists Network is an important step to take in this direction, and hopefully presages formation of other such organizations in the Asian region.

Second, I suggest creation of a standing women’s committee of the International Economic Association (IEA), which is the international affiliating body of economics societies and organizations. The IEA has regional, country-level, and disciplinary societies as members,

and organizes international conferences. This organization could serve as a coordinating body for the disparate women's groups in all its subsidiary organizations, potentially freeing the subsidiary organizations from having to bear much administrative burden. For instance, one member of each subsidiary organization could be designated for membership on the IEA committee and serve as liaison to the subsidiary organization. This would free the smaller local and topical organizations in particular from having to develop significant committee infrastructure to deal with issues of common interest such as women's issues.

Third, more needs to be done with regards to equalizing pay across gender in the profession. While pay disparities were a focus of CSWEP's data collection and activities in its earlier years, the focus has shifted to achieving tenure and promotion so as to achieve equal academic rank with men. Indeed, gender pay differences in academia are relatively small, although men are disproportionately represented among the higher earners and much more likely to be earning consulting fees in addition to their professorial salaries. But academic rank is not the only measure of professional success, particularly for those economists who are not in academia. Women in newer organizations in particular need to be alert to gender pay discrimination and publicize egregious cases of pay disparities.

I would also like to see more attention paid to recruitment of women into the economics profession. In part, if the profession were viewed as more welcoming to women, this problem might solve itself. Having more women economists in visible roles as professors and policymakers, and improving the profession's reputation as a well-organized, nondiscriminating career cannot hurt in this regard. But women's organizations may be able to play more of a role through developing career information materials and setting up networks to encourage young women to consider economics as a career.

Finally, both existing and new women's organizations need to maintain the instrumental role of policing the economics profession and calling attention to large gender disparities when necessary. These actions will include using the organizations to push research organizations to expand the representation of women on their staffs and to expand their research agendas to cover gender-related topics in some cases. It includes using the organizations to urge the appointment of women to economic policy-related positions and to other positions of power within and without the profession, like editorial boards and conference planning committees. Women who are active in topically-oriented organizations or local or regional economics organizations need to be cognizant of women's representation in these organizations. We need to track who the gatekeepers are, and become more of them ourselves.

On the other hand, we must be careful not to overburden women with representation for representation's sake. Women, as a minority group in economics and in many organizations in which they work as economists, are often called upon to serve on committees and do other service activities because they are women and economists. Too much service may cost them research productivity in the long run. More senior members of the profession should shoulder more of the networking and gatekeeping load so that younger women can get firm footing along their career paths.

While continuing vigilance is necessary to guard against gender discrimination, some women's committee activities can and will be reduced over time. For example, maintenance of a roster of woman economists is no longer a priority for CSWEP, as the visibility of women in the profession is now much higher. The advance of computer technology and the Internet have made it easier to spread information within and between groups and reduced publishing costs substantially. However, we are not yet at the date when being a woman and an economist is the

same as being a man and an economist from a professional viewpoint, and these committees can be put to rest, secure in the knowledge that gender discrimination has ended and gender differences are acknowledged but not disparaged.

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**Table 1: Representation of Women (Percentage of Women) by Category Within U.S. Academia, 1972-2004**

	1972	1982	1996	2000	2002	2004
Full Professor, economics	3	3	8	6	8	9
Associate Professor, economics	5	7	15	20	21	23
Assistant Professor, economics	8	13	24	30	30	30
PhD candidate, economics	12	15	24	31	28	29
MA candidate, economics	14	21	--	37	38	35
BA candidate, economics	15	33	--	34	33	34
Faculty, full-time, all fields	23*	29*	35	37	38	39
Graduate students, all fields	41	49	56	58	58	--
Undergraduate students, all fields	44	52	56	56	57	--

Sources: Economics data, 1973, 1983, and 2000-04—The American Economic Association's Universal Academic Questionnaire data; 1996—CSWEP-collected data. Faculty, graduate students and undergraduates, all fields—National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/edstats/>, *Digest of Education Statistics* 2004, Tables 186, 187, 228; 2003, Table 231; 2002, Table 228; 1999, Table 230; 1999, Table 174. \*data from three years previous.